

Fewer Major Fires in Raleigh

11/02/14 802 W - + 6 - 1

As you've ever experienced or observed, there are fewer major fires these days in the Capitol City. This year, the count of extra alarm fires appears to be exactly one:

- 3/23/14 - 611 Peyton - Apartments - 2 alarms

And in the two prior years, but six and five respectively. Here's that data, feel free to question or challenge (e.g., help with validation):

- 8/24/2013 - 5024 Manor Valley - Apartments - 2
- 5/31/2013 - 910 Tryon Hill - Multi-Use - 2
- 5/21/2013 - 3216 Calumet - Apartments - 2
- 5/8/2013 - 427 Woodburn - Commercial - 2
- 4/27/2013 - 1501 Graduate - Apartments - 2
- 12/26/2012 - 311 Glenwood - Commercial - 2
- 11/26/2012 - 4608 Brockton- Apartments? - 2
- 11/2/2012 - 6614 Lake Hill - Apartments - 2
- 10/5/2012 - 6615 Chapel Hill - Commercial - 2
- 9/28/2012 - 4417 Pleasant Valley - Commercial - 2
- 7/28/2012 - 5500 Hillsborough - Commercial - 2

Thus, for the last three years, the count of major fires has been one (2014), five (2013), and six (2012). Which is quite a reduction compared to the two prior years, twenty in 2011 and twelve in 2010. Let's look at the totals going back a double decade:

2014	1
2013	5
2012	6
2011	20
2010	12

2009	10
2008	19
2007	15
2006	20
2005	12
2004	20
2003	7
2002	10

1999	12
1998	16
1997	8
1996	11
1995	12
1994	10
1993	13
1992	13

2001	6	1991	8
2000	10	1990	9

Sources for those numbers? Legeros records, compiled from any and every source over the last decades-plus. (And here's a [related posting](#) from 2009 along those lines.)

About The Numbers

What's the criteria for a "major fire?" Glad you asked. It's either (a.) second-alarm or higher, or (b.) the arrival designation "major working fire" which was used until recent years, or (c.) the much-earlier arrival designation "Code III." Also, we're talking only structure fires plus one combination brush/structure fire, 2/10/08 at Six Forks and Newton roads.

Looking at these numbers, what conclusions can we or should we draw? The obvious one is that major fires are definitely decreasing and probably will continue decreasing. What do you think? Confirmed or too early to tell?

There's also a seeming increase in the early 2000s. What should we make of that?

Let's talk about labels. Just because a fire was called a major fire doesn't mean the quantity of fire (or resource needs for extinguishment) are equal across each and all years. (And what about "regular" working fires that were pretty darn big, but kept at a single alarm? Maybe a different officer or era of officer would have "struck the box" again.)

The better metrics might include, say, volume of fire or amount of damage. Or perhaps total people hours required, for all performed tasks. But since your friendly neighborhood fire historian only has this particular data...

Recent Operations Changes

What's caused or contributed to the recent decline? Here are some recent operational changes that have likely had an impact:

- 8/1/13 – New fireground procedures. Includes second water supply established. Culmination of two-year project updating engine, ladder, rescue fire ground procedures.
- 2/5/13 – Squad companies and heavy rescue company added, fifth battalion in service.
- 12/16/11 – Includes second ladder added on multi-residential, commercial, industrial fires. Fourth engine added, moved from working fire dispatch.
- Fall 2011 – Portable personal monitors added.
- Summer 2011 – New radio procedures, including call signs, six-point size-up, elimination of MWF designator.
- 6/8/11 – EFD activated. New call types, call criteria, and according response levels.

Sources? Earlier blog postings and back issues of the trusty [Raleigh Fire Department newsletter](#). What earlier year/decade Operations changes should be added to this list? Fourth Battalion in 2004? New CAD system in 2003?

Office of the Fire Marshal

Next is the question of fire inspection and fire protection systems, and their impact on our data. Milestones that come to mind include the addition of a platoon Deputy Fire Marshal in 2010, the moving of plans review to the fire department in 2006, and the addition of the first Fire Protection Engineer in 1992.

Looking at OFM staffing, there's a visible increase in recent years. Authorized positions in FY12 (32), FY11-08 (25), FY07 (21, includes eight positions moved from Building Construction), FY06-96 (13), FY95-93 (12), FY92 (10), FY91 (8), FY90 (7). Source for those are annual budget documents. Again, feel free to validate my data!

More information is probably (certainly?) needed, and by better minds than myself. Someone with an eye to building construction and code enforcement could comment better. Surely the codes and technologies have changed and with notable leaps in improvement.

We'd also benefit from some real estate data, or a few building historians. What's the change look like for fire load over the last twenty-plus years? Have some or many or most of the higher-risk properties burned or been demolished or been upgraded with sprinkler systems?

What are the sprinkler system milestones (locally, statewide, nationally), as well? That would be helpful to include.

Conclusions

Major fires appear to be in decline as compared to prior years and decades. Suppression is a big piece of the puzzle, but so is prevention. Need more information. Need more data.

Good fodder for discussion, speculation, or continued analysis.

There are so many people and equipment on the first alarm there is not a need for a second alarm in most cases. RFD use to get three engines, one ladder, rescue(2 people), and a Batt. Chief on structure fires. Up until last week the initial dispatch for a structure fire was Four engines, two ladders, Rescue, Squad, and two Batt. Chiefs. Now the squads have been dropped from initial dispatch. More people and equipment are not a bad thing. You can always turn them back. It does mess with the numbers some, not to take anything away from prevention. Also, we hit it hard from the outside through a window if we can. I am sure you remember Mike, that was a big "no no" up until a couple of years ago. Since this change in tactics, the fires do not get as big.

fire bug - 11/03/14 - 21:23

its a simple formula. What does it take to control a fire; water, tactics and resources. RFD has increased and worked on all the above in the past 3 years, and it is working. SO WHY WOULD YOU CHANGE IT? Why not work on returning units if they arent needed because the proactive changes WERE WORKING, versus trimming the squads because some people didn't want them to begin with. if anything, ADD a squad. Make E25 crew a squad because they go to all the training the others do and just reconfigure where they're located.

OldSchool - 11/04/14 - 15:04

Name: (real name preferred)

E-mail: (optional)

Web Site: (optional)

Remember personal info?

Yes

No

Comment:

/ [Textile](#)

Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?

[\(Register your username / Log in\)](#)

Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.

Hide email: Yes, hide my email address.

Small print: All html tags except and <i> will be removed from your comment. You can make links by just typing the url or mail-address.